Brawley California 1932,
To Cuatro Flats in the seventies.
The daughter of Braceros my grandmother
Was the first generation.

Mexican-American
Until she spoke in her mother tongue in school
And her teacher would yank her head back by her braid
A reminder that she is indeed *Mexican*-American

Even though español was
The only language she understood then.
The cleft in her identity
Had already begun to define her

Before she could define herself.
Mexican-American
First generation blood still runs
In my veins.

I have inherited their trauma
Their addictions.
Are we Paisanos, Chicanos, Wetbacks,
Spicks?

Mexican-Americans?
Sitting in the Silver Dollar Bar
Where Ruben Salazar was assassinated.
When LBJ was sending

Chicanos away to die in Vietnam.
My great-grandfather was there
With all the brown berets and
Horrific displays of police violence.

Father of my Nana
My Xochitl, Prophetess of
El Quinto Sol, the Flor
To my Canto.

Who painted Rios, Arboles
Maíz, Mujeres.
Symbols of the Earth Mother
To whom we owe our existence.

I honor her with my verse
From her I have inherited my vision
Poesía my offering to the ancestors.
Rezos en canto, magia en Lengua.

To the ancestors who skipped school in the blowouts
Who boycotted grapes in central California
Who supported la huelga, la causa
Que dijeron ¡Viva la Raza!

To my father whose hands
Upholstered cars, welded metal,
Cut grass, laid irrigation, trimmed
Trees, planted gardens, and tended to them,

The hands that raised me
I trace my roots in the calloused map of those hands,
I trace my roots in my brothers' green eyes, our grandfather' s gift
I trace my roots in the pealing laugh of my mother.

"Mis Raíces"
By Joseph Nuñez